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The TONGUES OF MAN

By

ELIZABETH LEMAY HAYES





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THE TONGUES OF MAN

UNIFORM WITH THIS VOLUME

HOW THE WORLD GREW UP

The Story of Anthropology

RACES OF MEN

The Story of Ethnology

HOW THE WORLD SUPPORTS MAN

The Story of Human Geography

MAN AND HIS RECORDS

The Story of Writing

MAN AND HIS CUSTOMS

The Story of Folkways

HOW THE WORLD IS RULED

The Story of Government

MAN AND HIS RICHES

The Story of Economics

HOW THE WORLD LIVES

The Story of Sociology

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Publishers' Note

This book presents in popular form the present state of science. It has been reviewed by a specialist in this field of knowledge. An excerpt from his review follows:

"It has been a great pleasure to read this charming little book on human speech. The writer has taken a difficult and unavoidably technical subject and has selected just those features and made just those emphases which bring it within the easy comprehension of the young. No boy or girl within the ages of ten to fourteen can take up this book and fail to be seized by the excitement of discovering unexpected novelties in a subject generally thought of as close to dry, if not actually dry."

Signed: EDWARD SAPIR
Sterling Professor of Ethnology and
Linguistics, Institute of Human
Relations—Yale University.



The robins' screams serve to frighten the cat

The
TONGUES of MAN

By
ELIZABETH LEMAY HAYES
11

Drawings by
BEN STAHL^y



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1931



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CHAPTER I

MAN'S FIRST SPEECH

MAN learned to use his tongue, his lips, and the vocal cords in his throat for speech so very long ago that no one now knows how it all began. But this much is certain: speech was not invented in a day nor even in a century. And no one man was its inventor. In one sense, speech is as old as man.

*Who invented
speech?*

As a matter of fact, man did not even invent the use of sounds for expressing feelings and wants, and for communicating with others of his kind. But he did perfect their use to express complex meanings, as no other creature has ever been able to do.

Birds and animals, for instance, have some of the elements of language. A flock of sparrows quarreling over a crust of bread can make their feelings very clear. It is easy to tell the

difference between the bark of a playful dog and the bark of an angry watchdog that knows his business and means to see to it. You can read a squirrel's whole nature in his busy chattering. So far as language is simply an expression of feeling, all these creatures and many more may be said to have language.

*Do animals
have a form
of speech?*

Animals can even make simple wants known and coöperate with one another by means of sounds. When a mother cat is looking for her kittens, her mewling means very plainly, "Where are you? Come here!" This is not saying that *mew*, as a word, means any more to the cat than it does to you. It is the way in which the cat "says" it that matters. Again, when a dog scratches on the outside of the screen-door with his paw, and whines, both the movement of his paw and the tone of the sound he makes mean very plainly, "Please let me in!" He is trying to express a want.

There is a song that robins sing when it rains, or when they think it is going to rain. The robins' song is not speech, but it does show a

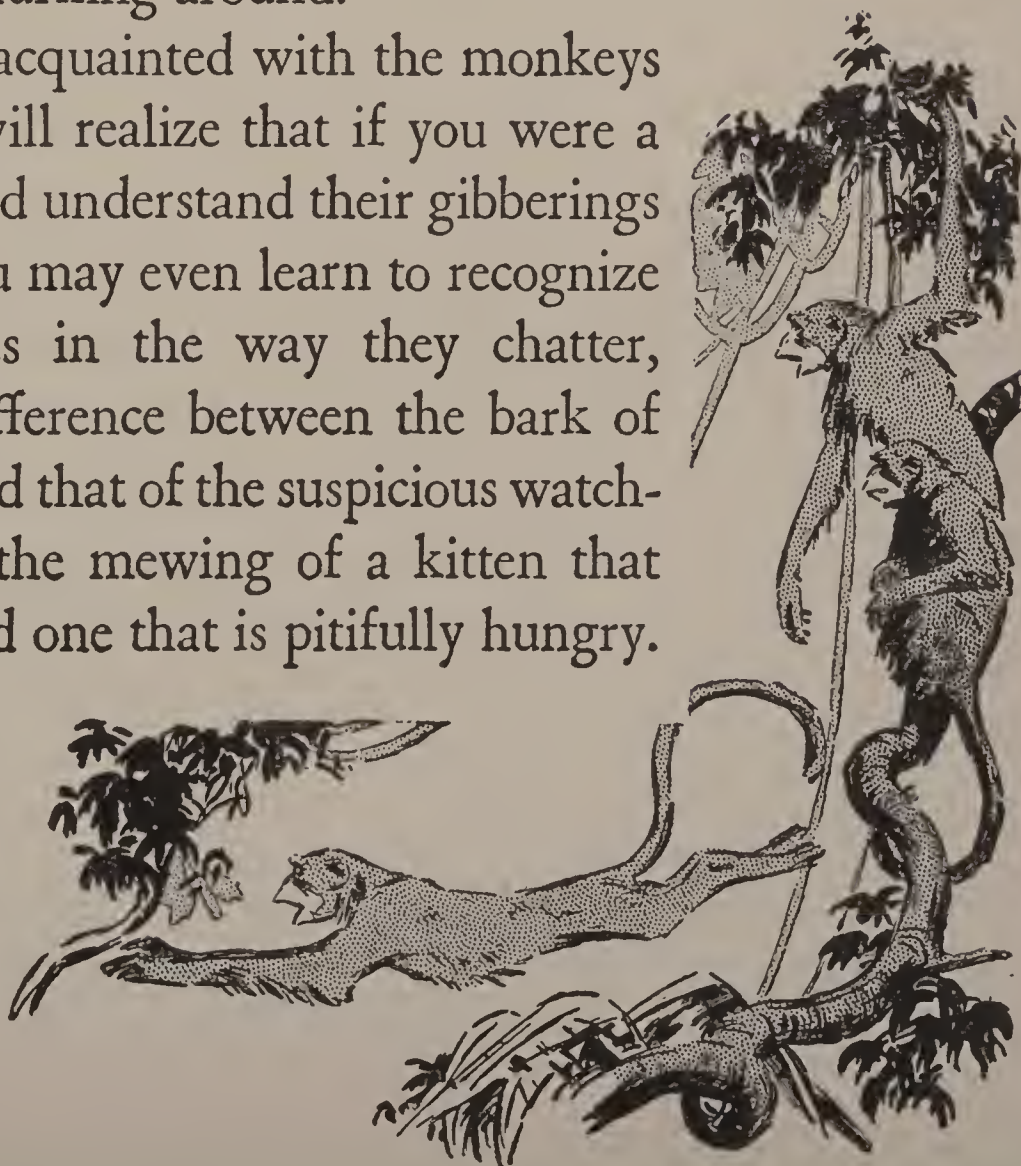
close connection between sound and meaning.

If a cat appears in the neighborhood of a pair of robins' nest when the young birds are learning to fly, he becomes the object of such cries of rage and anger as you will seldom hear a bird utter. The robins' screams serve to frighten the cat, as well as to impress the young birds with the danger connected with cats. In fact, all the other birds near-by, hearing the other robins' cries, join in the uproar. These particular sounds are so generally used by robins and other small birds to mean "Cat! Danger!" that if you hear the outcry you will be pretty sure to find a cat lurking around.

*How can we
tell what their
calls mean?*

If you become acquainted with the monkeys in the zoo, you will realize that if you were a monkey you would understand their gibberings very plainly. You may even learn to recognize certain differences in the way they chatter, much like the difference between the bark of the playful dog and that of the suspicious watchdog, or between the mewling of a kitten that is merely tired and one that is pitifully hungry.

*Monkeys have cer-
tain differences in the
way they chatter*



The first human speech must have slowly grown out of just such slight but important differences.

What are some early forms of speech?

Certain sounds come to us more easily, under special conditions, than others. Laughter does not always sound like "ha! ha!," but it is frequently something very much like that in sound. Cries of pain are usually "ow!" or "oh" or "oo." Many of the earliest words in human speech were natural cries expressing how the person making them felt.

So, too, just as the dog scratches at the door he wants opened, so early man must have eked out his few words with many gestures. The imitation of the cry of a bird or animal is a sort of sound-gesture, to give an idea of what the creature meant, if there is none in sight to point to. Many of the earliest words were probably imitations of other sounds in nature.

Because man's mouth and tongue and vocal cords are of a different shape and size from those of the creatures he tried to imitate, his imitations were not always very good, and the oftener

and the more carelessly he made the sound, the less it was like the original. It is much easier to say "bow-wow" than it is to bark. Even to-day, little children will speak of a dog as a *bow-wow*.

Numerous words in our language today are clearly imitative of sounds in nature, such as *bang, boom, cuckoo, hiss, sizzle, murmur, whisper*, and so on. One can easily see how strange it would be if *bang* meant "whisper."

*Do words sound
like their
meanings?*

But these emotional and imitative words make up only a small fraction of the words in a complex language. In the great majority of our words there is no relation between sound and sense, and this is true of other languages, too. *Tree* in English, *arbre* in French, and *baum* in German, though utterly different in sound, all mean exactly the same thing.

Such sounds in no way suggest the nature of the things that they name. Their meaning depends entirely upon custom, and has to be taught by one generation to the next. On the other hand, imitative words suggest themselves

so naturally that we often find similar words in languages spoken by people who are separated by great distances, and who are quite unacquainted with each other. Thus the word *kaka*, which means "crow," and is an imitation of that bird's harsh cry, is used by the Hindus in Asia and by the American Indians of Vancouver Island.

*How did the
Indians talk?*

Pure gesture, by movements of the hands and body, doubtless played a very important part in the development of language. It is surprising how much conversation can be carried on by means of gesture alone. In the early days of American history the Indians and the white men used a gesture, or sign language, to a large extent in their relations with each other, and so did the Indians belonging to tribes that spoke languages so different that they could not understand each other's speech.

Just how words as symbols or signs of thoughts and ideas were first created and fastened to their meanings is something no one really knows. Wise scholars have disagreed

over it a great deal. Of only a few facts may we be fairly sure. Man did not learn to speak all at once. Before he used anything like real speech, he must have expressed himself with crude cries, as animals still do. His first attempts at speech must have been helped out with gestures and imitations, and around these a language began to be built up.

*How did man
first talk?*

For instance, the word *spirit*, which we use in expressing some of our highest thoughts, comes from the Latin word *spiro*, which meant "breathe" or "blow," and the original word may have been suggested by the sound of breathing or blowing.

Human speech is a marvelous invention. If man were not an ingenious and inventive creature, forever trying something new, he might still be expressing himself with grunts and cries.

CHAPTER II

HOW LANGUAGE SPREAD OVER THE WORLD

*Has there always
been more than
one language?*

MAN, we are very sure, did not spring up all over the world at once, suddenly appearing in many places, as dandelions come out in the spring. But just as the first dandelion plant must have developed in some one place, from which it spread to conquer the fields of the world, so man, we believe, once had a single country for his home. In those far-away days, he probably had only one language, such as it was. But we can only guess what man's speech at that time may have been like.

Man's earliest home was somewhere in the Old World—just where, we do not know. His life was a very hard one, for he had few tools and weapons, and there were many fierce animals against which he had to defend himself. But he succeeded in making himself the master

of his little world, and in the course of time he needed new fields in which to hunt—for man learned to hunt long before he learned to farm.

So different groups of these early men, thousands of years ago, began to roam farther and farther from the old home.

*What changes
took place?*

Gradually, after many generations and many centuries had come and gone, bands of men with their families had found homes in all the out-of-the-way places of the earth that they could reach, where it was possible to make a living for themselves.

They built crude little boats in which they could cross short spaces of water. But the earth itself was different in those days. Some places that are covered by the sea now were dry land at that time, just as some of the places that are now dry land were then under the water.

There was a land bridge across from Siberia to Alaska, where there are now forty miles of water called Bering Strait. This strip of land

linked North America to Asia, and across it may have come some very early men into America, though no doubt there was water to be crossed when the ancestors of the American Indians made the passage into the New World.

Australia was brought closer to the continent of Asia by a range of mountains, of which the tops now appear above the ocean as a string of islands. Thus Australia and many of the islands of the South Pacific were populated in the distant past by hardy adventurers who braved stretches of open sea in their small boats.

Here again, we cannot say what sort of language men had in those early days when they were setting out on their wanderings. It may be that real language did not begin until later, and that it grew up in several different places.

*What was the
result of man's
wandering?*

The wandering groups must have met many new things in their long roaming through strange lands. They would need new words for these things. And as people got farther and farther away from the old homeland, they quite naturally must have forgotten many words con-



*These wandering groups must have met many new
things in their long roaming*

nected with their old lives, or they changed the meanings of the old words to fit the changed conditions that they found in their new surroundings.

As a language is handed down from one generation to another, tiny changes creep in. They are usually so slight that no one is aware just what changes are being made. But in the course of a few hundred years, these small changes may grow into very large changes. Bearing this fact in mind, we can easily see what must have happened to the speech of these early men during the many thousands of years that they were establishing themselves in new homes all over the world.

These wandering tribes settled themselves one by one in different places that they liked. Having no books or other records, they quickly forgot all about their former homes and the people that they had left behind there. Gradually new seas, new mountain ranges of lofty height, and new deserts of burning sand appeared. Thus many tribes were cut off from

*Did man's speech
change much?*

all contact with other people. It is said that the people of a little group of islands in the Indian Ocean used to think, until very recently, that their islands were the whole world.

*What happened
when men
settled in one
place?*

In favored countries, man learned to keep cattle and to raise grain. He no longer led the wandering life of the simple hunter searching for prey. He learned to build huts, to weave cloth, and to smelt metals. As he settled down into this new life, he needed more new words than ever before, with which to name the ever increasing number of new things that were coming into his life, and to express his thoughts about life and the world.

As the language of each little separate group slowly changed as time went on, it became less and less like the languages of other groups, once related to it, for these other languages also were changing. In some cases, however, a striking resemblance still remains in the languages spoken by peoples who have long been separated from each other by great distances of land and water.

On the other hand, there were contacts between many groups; there were wars, and there were invasions. A tribe might adopt the language of its conquerors and forget its own native speech; or, the conquerors might gradually learn the speech of their subjects and give up the language that they had brought with them. And the practice of one language borrowing words from another language began very early.

*How did other
changes come
about?*

CHAPTER III

THREE GREAT LANGUAGE FAMILIES

*Are there many
languages?*

THE languages and dialects (varieties of a language) spoken in different parts of the world are almost countless. Nevertheless, many of them may be grouped into a few large families. But there will still be a large number left out that do not seem to be related to others. Such is the Basque tongue, which is the language of a few thousand people living in the valleys of the Pyrenees between France and Spain.

Another interesting fact is that a language sometimes does not have much or anything to do with the race of those speaking it. A people may drop its native language and learn to speak a very different one. This often happens as a result of wars and invasions. Sometimes, too, a people still continues to speak its

native language, although the race changes greatly through intermarriage.

Thus the Turks, who now differ very little in appearance from their Caucasian neighbors, still speak their old language of the Altaic, or Mongolian family. The Negroes in the United States now all speak English, a language very different from the speech of their ancestors. In Ceylon, the large island south of India, the Veddas, a dark-skinned, uncivilized tribe, speak a language that is a distant cousin of the languages spoken by European and American white people.

Most of the white people of the world speak languages that belong to one or another of three great language families: first, the Indo-European; second, the Semitic; and third, the Hamitic.

*What languages
do most white
people speak?*

The majority of the languages of Europe, including English, belong to the Indo-European family. That language family, therefore, is the most interesting to us. It covers a wide range of territory in the Old World, stretching from

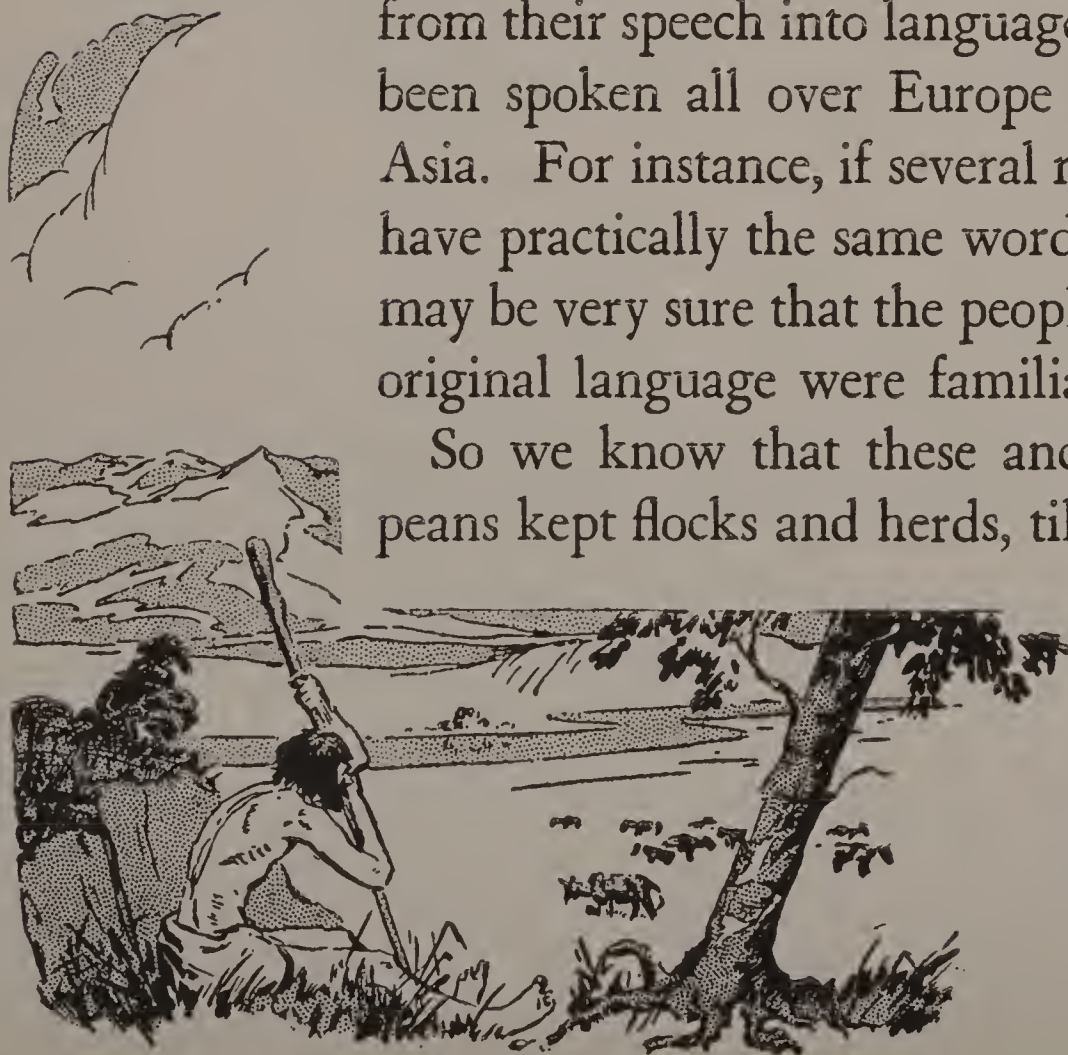
Iceland southeastward across Europe and Asia to India and Ceylon, though other languages break through the belt here and there.

*Where did the
Indo-Europeans
come from?*

The languages of this great speech family are all descended from the language spoken by a very ancient people, sometimes called the Aryans but more properly the Indo-Europeans. They may have lived in western Asia, near the Caspian Sea, or in the region north of the Black Sea, in what is now southern Russia.

Although these people did not know how to write, and so have left no record of their language, we know something of the kind of life they led. We have discovered facts about their life by studying the words that have come down from their speech into languages that have long been spoken all over Europe and in parts of Asia. For instance, if several related languages have practically the same word for "cattle," we may be very sure that the people who spoke the original language were familiar with cattle.

So we know that these ancient Indo-Europeans kept flocks and herds, tilled the soil, and



*Several related lan-
guages have practi-
cally the same word
for "cattle"*

worked in metals, that they had strong family ties, that they made and obeyed laws, that they fought in chariots, that they revered their ancestors, and that they had a religion of nature, in which they worshiped the sun, the sky, the waters, and fire.

*What sort of lives
did they live?*

Many centuries before Christ, these people began to wander far from their original home. We do not know just why; there are no records. It may have been that the land was too poor to support the growing numbers of the people; perhaps the land was becoming too dry to furnish pasturage; or perhaps they were pushed on by other peoples behind them.

At any rate, they sent out wave after wave of colonists, who went into other lands, conquering the people that they found there and intermarrying with them, so that their descendants became mixed in blood, more in some countries and less in others. But in time nearly all the peoples of these different lands learned to speak the language of the Indo-Europeans, which of course took on different changes in

different countries, and added to itself thousands of new words.

*What languages
are like their
tongue?*

But many of the words of the original Indo-European language still live in languages such as Hindustani and Bengali in India, modern Persian, modern Greek, Armenian, Italian, Spanish, French, German, Danish, Swedish, Norwegian, Icelandic, Dutch, English, Gaelic, Russian, Polish, and Lithuanian. The words have changed somewhat in form in the different languages, but the resemblance is still very striking, especially in words such as those relating to the family, common things of daily life, and numbers. Take, for example, the words meaning “father” in some of the Indo-European languages, both old and new:

Latin	pater
Greek	patēr
French	père
Spanish	padre
German	vater
Old Irish	athir
Sanskrit (Old Hindu)	pitā

Perhaps the earliest Indo-European invaders were the Celts, for the Celtic languages seem to have changed most from the original Indo-European speech. At one time the Celtic-speaking people occupied a large part of western Europe, including practically all of the country that is now France, as well as the British Islands. Modern forms of Celtic still are spoken in a few places.

Another group of Indo-Europeans wandered off to the region round the Baltic Sea, their descendants filling up the Scandinavian peninsula, the shores of the North Sea, and much of the country that is now Germany and near-by territory. Some of these people adopted a seafaring life and became daring sailors, much feared by the inhabitants of other lands. Later, branches of this race conquered England. They even planted colonies in far-off Iceland and Greenland. Icelanders were the first Europeans to reach America, nearly 500 years before Columbus. The languages of all these people are called Germanic, or Teutonic, while those

*What family did
the Germanic
peoples come
from?*

of Norway, Sweden, Denmark, and Iceland, though belonging to the same family, are called Scandinavian.

*What became of
the tribes that
went southward?*

Other Indo-Europeans went southward into the peninsula of Greece, conquering the original inhabitants. Their descendants built up a civilization of such splendor that we still study Plato's philosophy and Euclid's geometry, and hold Olympic games in imitation of the famous Greek athletic meets. The beautiful Greek language, much simplified, is still spoken in its old home, which the Greeks themselves called Hellas.

Still other Indo-Europeans found their way down into the neighboring peninsula of Italy. Centuries later, the little town of Rome became more and more powerful and at last was mistress of the Mediterranean and the capitol of a powerful empire. The Roman Empire included the whole of the civilized western world of that time.

Rome was situated in a district called Latium, and its language was known as Latin. The

Romans imposed their language on many of the provinces of their great empire; and for a thousand years after the political power of Rome had faded away, Latin was still the language of law, religion, diplomacy, and learning all over Europe.

As a result of the wars and invasions following the break-up of the Roman Empire, the Latin tongue in common speech began to undergo great changes, both in Italy and in other lands. By about 800 A. D., Latin, in the form in which it was used by the great writers and speakers of Rome, had started to change, as the language of everyday life, into modern Italian, French, Spanish, Portuguese, and other languages of western and southern Europe.

Over in southeastern Europe a similar change was going on. There were Roman colonies in the country now known as Roumania (Romania), and their Latin speech grew into the modern Roumanian language, in which many old Latin words still flourish.

These modern tongues are called Romance

*How was the
Latin tongue
changed?*

languages, because they are all variations of the ancient Roman speech.

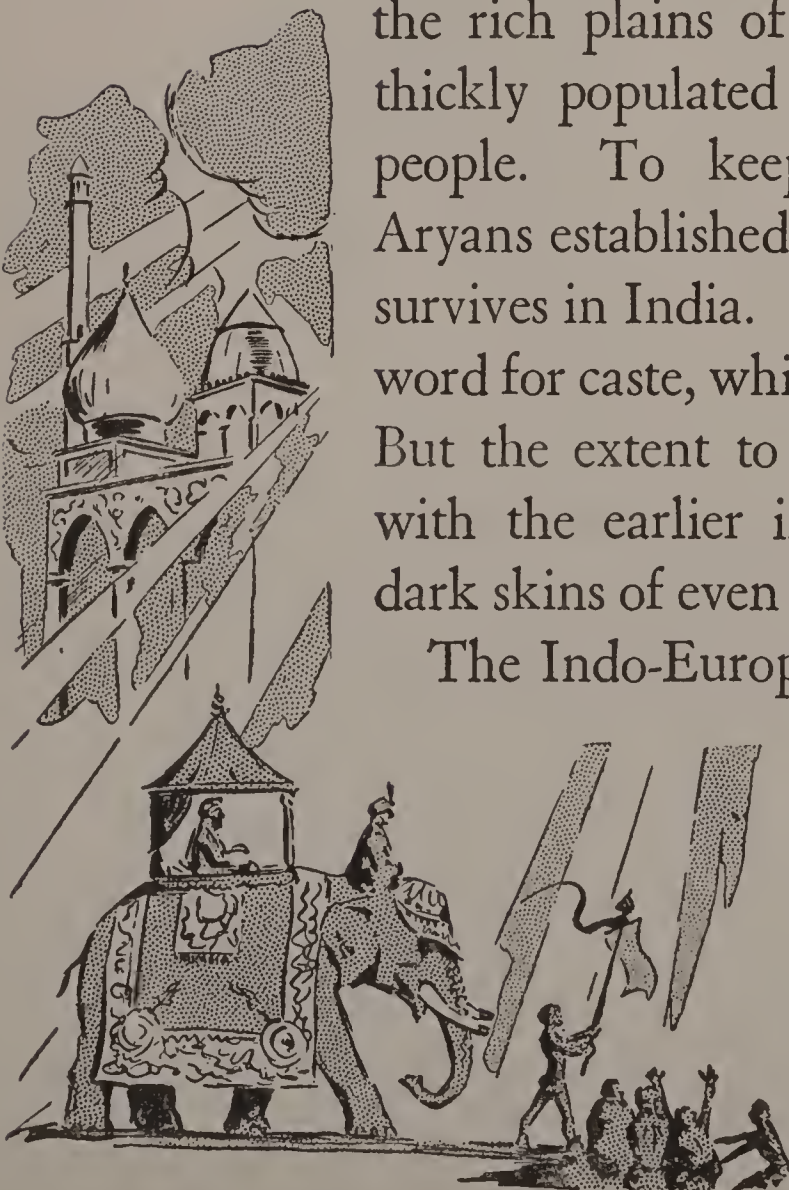
*Where else did
Indo-Europeans
settle?*

Another group of Indo-Europeans settled in eastern Europe. From their speech have come the languages of the Slavic peoples today, including the Russians, the Poles, the Czechoslovaks, the Bulgarians, and the Yugo-Slavs. From still another related group comes the modern Lithuanian language.

Meanwhile, a great branch of the Indo-Europeans had turned their faces toward India and Persia. We call them the Aryans. They separated into two divisions, one of which invaded the rich plains of India, which were already thickly populated by a dark-skinned race of people. To keep themselves separate, the Aryans established the caste-system, which still survives in India. We know this, because their word for caste, which was *varna*, meant "color." But the extent to which the Aryans mingled with the earlier inhabitants is shown by the dark skins of even the high-caste Hindus today.

The Indo-European language of ancient In-

*The Aryans established the
caste-system*



dia was Sanskrit. In its original form it is no longer spoken; but like Latin in Europe it has survived in greatly changed modern forms scattered over India, though some of the native languages are still spoken. We know what Sanskrit was like, because the sacred books of the Hindus were written in it, and we can study those books today.

The other division of the Aryans went down into Persia, which evidently was not so thickly populated with dark-skinned people, because the Persians of today are much lighter-skinned than their Hindu relatives. Their ancient language still lives in changed modern forms.

The two other great language families of the white race are Semitic and Hamitic. They show scarcely any resemblance to the Indo-European tongues, but some scholars think there may have been a relationship in the distant past. In ancient times, forms of the Semitic language were spoken by famous peoples such as the Assyrians, the Phoenicians, the Carthaginians, and the Jews. The chief modern

*Who first spoke
the Semitic
tongue?*

form of Semitic is the Arabic language, which the Mohammedan religion carried far and wide. The Abyssinian, or Ethiopic, language of Africa also is Semitic.

*How is Semitic
different from
our language?*

The Semitic speech is very interesting, because it is so different from ours. Its words are mostly formed from a certain number of "roots," usually of three consonants, the vowels between them being changed and syllables called affixes added to make new meanings.

Take, for instance, the root *m-l-k*, the idea which it carries being "to reign." In the Hebrew or Jewish language there are many verbs and nouns from this root, including:

mâlak	he reigned
mâlkû	they reigned
yimlôk	he shall reign
timlôk	thou shalt reign
melek	king
melâkîm	kings
malkênû	our king
malkâ	queen
mimlâkâ	kingdom

Hamitic probably is related to Semitic. It was spoken by the ancient Egyptians, and forms of it still live among the Berber peoples of northern Africa.

CHAPTER IV

SOME OTHER GREAT LANGUAGE FAMILIES

THERE are some groups of people in Europe who speak languages belonging to a markedly different family, called the Finno-Ugrian, though most of these peoples do not differ noticeably in appearance from their neighbors who speak Indo-European languages.

*What other
root tongue
was there?*

The Finno-Ugrian language family includes Lapp, Finnish, Esthonian, Hungarian, and a number of less well-known tongues. These are distantly related to the Samoyed languages of northern Russia and northern Siberia. They are also believed to have some connection with the Altaic family of languages, which includes Tatar or Turkish, Mongolian, and the Manchu-Tungus languages of northeast Asia. Some scholars even believe that there is also a relationship with the Japanese language, but this

is very uncertain. Perhaps there exists a distant kinship between the Finno-Ugrian languages and the Indo-European.

At any rate, we know that some of the Finno-Ugrian tongues have been borrowing words from the neighboring Indo-European languages since ancient times. This is a common practice among languages. There is a constant "borrowing" going on; one language takes over from neighboring or even distant languages words that express some idea or name something for which there is no corresponding word in that language or which is not so well expressed already in the borrowing language. English is full of such "loan words," as they are called. Even such strange languages as the Eskimo has given us *kayak* (a sort of canoe), and the Basque *anchovy* (a small fish), while the Malayo-Polynesian of the Pacific islands has given us *taboo* and *tattoo*.

What is the practice of "borrowing" words?

The Finno-Ugrian and Altaic languages are called *agglutinative*. This simply means that syllables are joined together to make words in

a way that is strange to us. First there is a "root," and after it syllables called suffixes are added, which together give the meaning of the word. For instance, in Hungarian *szék* is "chair," and *székem* is "my chair." In Turkish *sev* means "to love," and *sevishdirilmediler* means "they were not to be brought to love one another."

*How does
Chinese differ
from our
language?*

In southeast Asia there is another great language family that is very different from the Indo-European, the Semitic and Hamitic, the Finno-Ugrian, and the Altaic groups. This language family includes Chinese, Siamese, and Burmese. It is the tongue of hundreds of millions of people. These languages are composed of monosyllables (one-syllable words). Every word is an independent single syllable, unconnected with other syllables. Since the number of monosyllables is rather limited, each one of them has a number of different meanings, sometimes as many as nine. The exact meaning of a word is shown by the tone of voice in which it is pronounced.



*For many centuries the Chinese have been a
highly civilized people*

Chinese, of course, is the leading language of the group. This tongue, or dialects of it, is spoken throughout an immense and thickly populated territory. We might think that the Chinese language, because it is so simple in structure, is a survival of an undeveloped language of early man. But this may not be so. Chinese, in the distant past, may have been much more complex, just as English and other languages once were. The Chinese, for many centuries, have been a highly civilized people.

Then there is still another very widespread language family of the Old World. This is the Malay, or Malayo-Polynesian, which extends from the Malay peninsula through the East Indies and out among the islands of the Pacific Ocean, from Hawaii to New Zealand. In the Malay form, this speech has a very complex grammar, but it is much simpler in the far-away islands, where the words are simpler, too. For instance, the Malays say *tasik* for "sea," and *langit* for "sky," whereas the Hawaiian and New Zealand natives say *tai* and *lai*.

*What is the
Malay tongue
like?*

There are two great branches of the Negro race: the Oceanic Negroes, who inhabit certain islands of the Pacific Ocean, and the African Negroes. But they speak very different languages. In fact, the languages of the African Negroes are not all of the same family. A prominent language family of Central and South Africa is the Bantu, forms of which are spoken by many tribes. These languages make words in just the opposite way from the Finno-Ugrian and Altaic languages. They put syllables, called prefixes, on in front of the word-root. For instance, a certain tribe is known as the Basuto. One person is called *mosuto*, his country is *lesuto*, and his character is *bosuto*.

Which language
uses "clicks?"

In South Africa there is another interesting language family, the Hottentot-Bushman, forms of which are spoken by those two tribes. The peculiar thing about this speech is that it uses "clicks," something like the sound that a coachman makes to his horses.

The American Indians, it is now generally agreed, are, like the Malays and Polynesians,

a branch of the Mongolian race. But they speak languages all their own. It is said that in North and South America there are more than 150 separate language stocks, many as distinct from one another as English is from Chinese or Bantu. This is true even of languages spoken by close neighbors, such as the Iroquois and the Algonquians.

The Indian languages have as complex grammatical structure as the languages of many highly civilized people. Often they are pleasing in sound. They have, too, many abstract words, such as those expressing the qualities of persons and things. Some are “inflected” languages, like Latin and Greek, and some have lost much of their former inflection, like English. Others are more like the “agglutinative” languages, such as Turkish. Many of them are what is called “polysynthetic;” that is, a number of separate meanings or ideas are passed together into one word, which is often a very long one. Among the tribe known as the Yanas, the word-stem *ya* means “several people move.”

*Are Indian
languages
simple in form?*

Then they add to this many other syllables in order to express a thought which we might translate like this: "Let us, each one of us, move indeed to the west across the creek." That whole sentence becomes one word, which is, in their language, *yābanaumawildjigumma-ha'nigi*.

*How do they
express different
meanings to the
same word?*

Some of the Indian languages also have pitch, or difference of tone, like the Chinese, but the different tones may express either a difference in a word's meaning or a difference in grammar.

CHAPTER V

THE EARLY SPEECH OF ENGLAND

IN THE earliest times of which we know anything definite about the land that we now call England, the people living there were probably of the ancient Mediterranean race, formerly known as the Iberians. The British Islands at that time were connected by land with the mainland of Europe. This early people inhabited all of the western part of Europe before the Celts, whom we mentioned a while ago, came in. These Mediterraneans were a rather small, dark-complexioned people. They certainly were not civilized. We can trace them back to the New Stone Age, thousands of years ago.

Who were the first people in England?

When the Celts, that western branch of the early Indo-European people, came to Britain they made it their own. We do not know what

sort of language the Mediterraneans spoke, for they forgot it when they learned to speak the language of their conquerors. The Basque language, which we have already mentioned, may be a present-day relative of it.

*Is the Celtic
language still
spoken?*

The language of the early Celts still has, as we have noticed, a number of living forms, spoken in parts of Ireland, in the Scottish Highlands, in Wales, and in the northwest corner of France, known as Brittany. These remnants of the old Celtic speech differ more or less among themselves; they are called Irish, Gaelic (in Scotland), Welsh, and Breton. The people of Cornwall, in southwestern England, spoke a Celtic language until about a century and a half ago. Cornish is now a dead language.

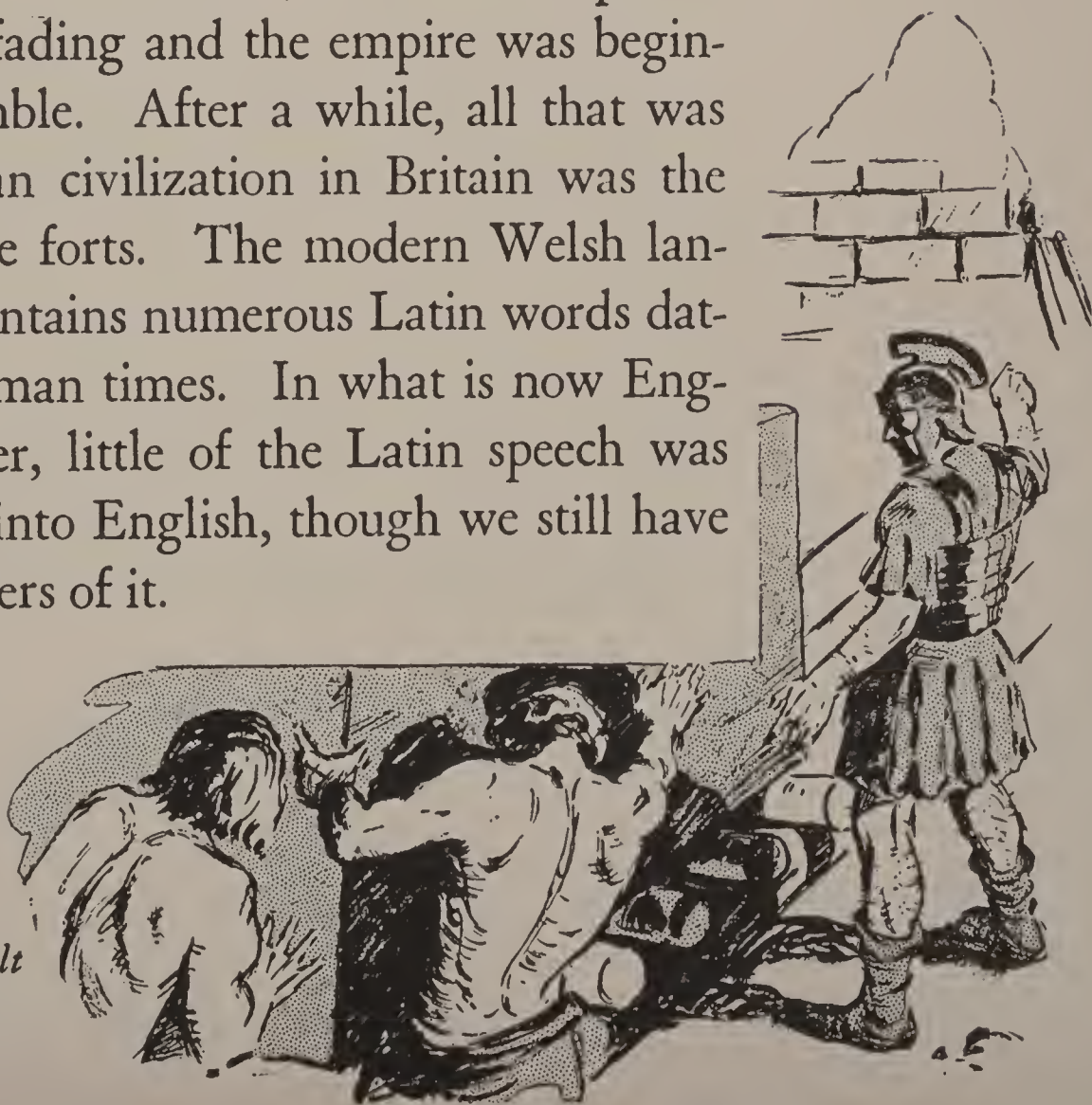
In the year 55 B. C., the great Roman general, Julius Caesar, conquered Britain, as we call the England of that time, with his well-trained troops. It was probably not a very difficult victory, for the Celtic islanders were but simple backwoods folk in comparison with the highly skilled and disciplined Roman soldiers.

Within the next hundred years, the Romans built lines of forts across Britain. Between these forts stretched smooth Roman highways, some of which are used as roads to this day. Around each important fort there arose a little town.

What happened when the Romans came to England?

For more than four hundred years, Britain remained a part of the great Roman Empire, and all these little provincial towns flourished. Then Rome's fortunes changed. Rome itself was threatened by barbaric invaders from the north and east. The Roman legions (as the troops were called) in Britain were called back to Italy to help protect the threatened capitol.

They never came back, for Rome's power was rapidly fading and the empire was beginning to crumble. After a while, all that was left of Roman civilization in Britain was the roads and the forts. The modern Welsh language still contains numerous Latin words dating from Roman times. In what is now England, however, little of the Latin speech was carried over into English, though we still have some reminders of it.



The Romans built lines of forts across Britain

What did they
leave behind
them?

For instance, the Latin word for “a military camp” is *castra*. To this day there are many English towns that have names ending in *caster*, *cester*, and *chester*. These were once *castra*. England’s Lancasters, Worcesters, Gloucesters, and Rochesters bear witness to the fortified Roman camps that once dotted England.

Castrum is Latin for “fort,” and *castellum* for “little fort.” From *castellum* to our English word *castle* is but a short cut for the tongue to take. Our word *street* comes from the Latin *strata*, meaning “a paved highway.” Our word *port* comes from the Latin *portus*. *Wall* is from the Latin *vallum*.

When the Romans left Britain, the Celts missed the protection that the Romans had given them for some four hundred years. They found themselves unable to beat off the fierce Norsemen, or Danes, who began making raids upon the rich and pleasant island. Finally, the Celts called for help to the Germanic tribes living on the other side of the North Sea.

Three of these tribes immediately answered

the call. The Angles and Saxons and Jutes were good warriors, and large numbers of them crossed into Britain. They liked the country so well that they stayed. And more of them kept coming. By the year 500 there were probably more Angles and Saxons and Jutes in England than there were Celts. For many years these tribes fought among themselves over the dividing up of the island among them. They pushed the Celts into the background, just as the latter had once pushed the Mediterranean.

*What happened
when new tribes
came to Britain?*

Now the Celts and the Germanic Angles, Saxons, and Jutes spoke related Indo-European languages. But the Celtic and Germanic languages, in the course of time, had become so different that only a wise scholar could have discovered that they ever had anything to do with each other. The Angles, the Saxons, and the Jutes themselves did not speak exactly the same tongue; but their languages were much more closely related to each other than to Celtic.

Since the Germanic-speaking people were

*What Celtic
words are still
used?*

more numerous and more powerful than the Celtic-speaking people, their language quickly took the place of the Celtic tongue. Only a few Celtic words, therefore, have found their way into the English language. Among them are such words as *bard*, *bog*, *brogue*, *dun*, *glen*, *lad*, *shamrock*, and *slogan*. There are other much less common words, such as *bannock*, a kind of bread; *brock*, a badger; *down*, a hill; and *loch*, a lake. But even these did not all come into the language in the time of the Angles and Saxons; most of them, in fact, have entered since then.

By the seventh century, the invaders had sorted out the English country pretty much to suit themselves. The Jutes had the south-east corner of England, called Kent; the Saxons had the rest of the southern part. The Angles occupied the northern and central part of England as well as the lowlands of Scotland. The Celts, however, still held Cornwall and Wales, the highlands of Scotland, and all of Ireland.

Although the Christian religion and the art

of writing had come into England while the Celts still held the land, the Angles, the Saxons, and the Jutes were still pagans. They were practically without any writing; their priests and magicians, however, knew a rude alphabet of marks called *runes*, with which they used to carve short inscriptions on rocks.

In the year 597, Christian missionaries from Rome began to come into England; missionaries from Celtic Ireland also came. After the Germanic peoples of England became Christians, they learned the Roman alphabet. But only a few persons—the priests and the monks—learned to write. At first they wrote only Latin. After a while, some of them tried to put their native speech into writing by means of the Roman alphabet. They used the Celtic script, which had dropped a few of the Roman letters. Then they added two extra letters, called *wen* and *thorn*, which came from the old runes. But these two letters died out after the coming of the Normans, whom we shall speak about later, and who introduced the full Roman alphabet.

*Who brought
the alphabet to
England?*

*Where did the
English language
come from?*

The first Germanic tongue which was used for writing in England was one of the Anglian dialects, and thus our language came to be called English. When the West Saxons got the upper hand, their dialect became the literary language. But the name *English* had come to stay.

Both of these early English tongues were much like the various other West Germanic languages that were spoken at that time. The Dutch language of our own day is, like English, a modern representative of them.

Here is a sample of Old English, or, as it is sometimes called, Anglo-Saxon:

*Nis heofonrice gelic tham lige: ac this is
landa betst.*

You can see how our language has changed since those days, by comparing this sentence with the way that it would be written in the English of today:

Is not the kingdom of heaven like this flame?
But this is the best of lands.

In the ninth century something else happened. The Norsemen, or Danes, whom the

people of Britain had been trying so long to keep out, began settling in the northern part of England. The Danes spoke a Germanic language of the Scandinavian family. It was akin to those spoken today in Denmark, Norway, Sweden, and Iceland.

*What happened
in the ninth
century?*

As a matter of fact, the Anglo-Saxon and the Scandinavian tongues were so much alike that the English and the Danes of those days, each talking their own language, could understand each other. Some of their words were exactly alike; others were nearly so.

Thus the word for "fish" was and still is *fisk* in Danish. *Fish*, the Old English word, kept its place in our language. But *Fisk* still lives among us as a family name. The English adopted many Danish words, however, while the Danes gave up their own tongue and learned English.

Today our language contains more Scandinavian words than many of us realize. *Take, call, care, hit, throw, ill, ugly, wrong, die, fellow, husband, sky, skin, wing, law*, and many

*The Norsemen
brought many
new words to
England*



others of our commonest words are Scandinavian in origin.

During the next two centuries, from the ninth to the eleventh, West Saxon English was becoming well established as the literary language of England. Then another band of people came in. It was the Norsemen again. This time, however, they were in disguise.

These northern men—for *Norse* means “north”—were a strong, adventurous race. They invaded many lands. In the tenth century a body of Norsemen had seized and conquered a fertile province in the north of France, which is still known as Normandy.

*What were
the Normans
like?*

Now the Norsemen—or Normans, as the French called them—were not nearly so civilized and cultured as the people they had conquered; they were not very numerous, and they found themselves in the midst of a long-established civilization. They were quick and eager to learn, and they were far from their old home and kinsmen. So they learned the French language and adopted the civilization of their new

country. It was these Normans from France, under their Duke William, who conquered England in the year 1066.

Duke William became King William I of England; he is often known as William the Conqueror. He and his nobles and followers brought their adopted French language with them into England.

*Did they bring
a new language
to England?*

London, the capital of the kingdom, now became the literary center of the country. Wessex and its dialect lost their former importance. The type of English spoken in London differed from that of Wessex, and this fact had a far-reaching effect upon the future history of the English language.

CHAPTER VI

HOW ENGLISH GREW UP

IF THE British country-folk had not been so firmly set in their habits, the English language might have been forgotten entirely and French adopted in its place. But they clung to their own language, which by this time had become firmly rooted in the land. And it was by now a literary language, in which many books had been written.

*Why did not
French become
the language of
England?*

The king and his court, the nobles, the people of fashion, and the office-holders down to the least-important judge, all spoke French. But the common folk, throughout England, continued to speak English, and they were the great majority of the people. Therefore, everybody had to know English. Even the great noble would have to speak English when he hired a cook, as would the office-holder when he went

to the cobbler to have a pair of shoes made and the lord when he spoke to the serfs on his land.

From 1066 until nearly 1400, English and French shared England between them. As the West Germanic peoples who first came into England, and later the Danes, got together and became English, so the Normans, too, finally forgot their foreign origin and became Englishmen, just as their ancestors had become Frenchmen. It was easy for them to do this, because they were really a Germanic people and French was not their original language.

What gradually happened?

About 1200, the political connection between France and England was broken. Before this time, the Kings of England had continued to be Dukes of Normandy in France. As the English ruling class ceased to follow France politically, they gradually lost their interest in French ways. It was no longer considered so important to know and speak the French language. Latin, which always had been the language of the Church, became also the language of law and of learning.

*Did the French
language affect
English?*

Naturally, in those three hundred years, when the two languages shared the country between them, English was much influenced by French. Many words from the fashionable tongue slipped into the common speech; so many, in fact, that we cannot attempt to list them all there. Some of them are now among the most familiar of our words. *Aunt, uncle, cousin, nephew, and niece*, for instance, are from the French. So are *chair, table, dinner, supper, fork, roast, and boil*. We would have a hard time carrying on business without such words as *cost, expense, price, charge, and cash*, all of which are of French origin.

Sometimes, as in the case of certain business terms, French words were taken into English because there was no English word to serve the purpose. Sometimes a French word was more convenient—shorter or easier to say. Sometimes, again, a newly adopted French word and an older English word both were kept in the language and gradually came to have slightly different meanings.

For instance, the French word *royal* came into English in spite of the fact that it meant almost exactly the same thing as the native word *kingly*. And as if *royal* and *kingly* were not enough, *regal* was taken from the Latin. Yet we are glad to have all three words today; they make a pleasing variety, and the language is that much richer.

A curious result of French and English living side by side still survives in such pairs of words as *cow-beef*, *sheep-mutton*, *calf-veal*, *pig-pork*, and *deer-venison*. The living animals were tended by Anglo-Saxon cowherds, shepherds, swineherds, and gamekeepers. But poor people could seldom afford to eat meat. So when the flesh of these animals was served at the tables of the Norman nobles, it took on French names, which have lasted down to our own day. How strange it would seem to go into a meat market and ask for "pig chops!"

By the year 1400, the English language was getting to be a good deal as it is today. When you first try to read a page from the poet

*Why are there
two English
words for certain
meats?*

Chaucer, who lived from 1340 to 1400, you find it rather strange, although much of it is familiar. The spelling seems very queer, and many of the words are not now in use. If you could whisk yourself back five hundred years or more, you would find that the speech sounded as strange to our modern ears as it looks on the printed page. But in spite of all that, it would be English.

*Can you
understand
Chaucer's
English?*

Here are a few lines from Chaucer's famous book, *The Canterbury Tales*. How much of them can you understand?

*"A Shipman was ther, wonynge fer by weste;
For aught I woot, he was of Dertemouthe.
He rood upon a rouncy, as he kouthe,
In a gowne of faldyng to the knee.
A daggere hangynge on a laas hadde he
About his nekke, under his arm adoun."*

Here is how we should have to change the lines to make them plain to an English-speaking reader today:

*"A sailor was there, living far westward;
For aught I know, he was from Dartmouth."*



*"He rood upon a rouncy, as he kouthe,
In a gowne of faldyng to the knee."*

*He rode upon a nag, as he could,
In a gown of coarse cloth to the knee.
A dagger hanging on a cord had he,
About his neck, down under his arm."*

It was not so very long ago, after all. Since 1400 there have been only about eighteen generations, from father to son. In those eighteen generations people never imagined that their children were not learning the very same language that they themselves had learned in their childhood.

If we could make time run backward, we could go back to the days of Shakespeare, who lived from 1564 to 1616. That was only about eleven generations ago. If we could enter one of the London theaters where Shakespeare's plays were first acted, and witness a performance, our first feeling would probably be one of great surprise to find that the actors all spoke with a strong Scotch or Irish accent. That was the way English was spoken even in London in those days. In Scotland and Ireland there has been less change in the spoken language,

*How was English
spoken in
Shakespeare's
time?*

because the English-speaking people in those countries have been somewhat out of touch with the changing standards of English speech.

But the English of Shakespeare does not look nearly so strange to us as the English of Chaucer, although we still have trouble with some words that have since gone out of use, or that are now old-fashioned, although still sometimes used on special occasions.

*Is it hard to
read Shakespeare
today?*

Here, for instance, are a few lines from Shakespeare's great play, *Othello*. These lines were written over three hundred years ago; but as you will see, they are very plain to readers of today.

*"Good name in man or woman, dear my lord,
Is the immediate jewel of their souls.
Who steals my purse, steals trash; 'tis some-
thing, nothing;
'Twas mine, 'tis his, and has been slave to
thousands;
But he that filches from me my good name,
Robs me of that which not enriches him,
And makes me poor indeed."*

The ways in which some of our English words were formerly pronounced are shown in our spelling; for we have kept to the old ways of writing, to a very large extent, although our spoken language has changed. The letters *gh*, for instance, are still kept in many words in which they are no longer pronounced, such as *might, night, through, though*. This sound *gh* used to be pronounced in the back of the mouth. It was a harsh sound, like the German *ch* in *ach*. It was a common sound in the Germanic languages. But when the Normans learned to speak French, which did not have this sound, they forgot how to pronounce it. Then, when they began to speak English, they found this sound strange, and so they dropped it. But in Scotland it is still pronounced, as in *thocht* (thought).

*Why has our
spoken language
changed?*

In the same way, the *k* before *n* in words like *knife* and *knight* was once pronounced but is now silent. In German this *k* is still pronounced with full force, in words such as *knabe* (boy). This last word is the same as our

English word *knave*, which now means “rogue,” and in which the *k* is silent.

In these and other ways the Normans varied the pronunciation of English.

*Are the same
spellings always
pronounced the
same?*

If you try to pronounce such a word as *knight* according to the way it is spelled, you will readily see that the change has tended to make speaking easier. But the results have not always been the same. For instance, we pronounce *ough* one way in *through*, and quite another way in *enough*. If you should say “thruf” and “enoo,” no one would know what you were talking about.

But if you stop to think about it, you will realize that *through* almost always comes at the beginning or in the middle of a sentence. The next word usually begins with a strong sound of its own, so that to pronounce the *gh* even as softly as *f* would be rather awkward. Nothing would be gained by the extra trouble.

On the other hand, *enough* is very apt to come at the end of a sentence, as “I have enough.” The *f* sound that we put at the end

of *enough* nowadays is the ghost of the old Germanic *gh*, which, in the position where a consonant is suitable as a closing sound, has not been quite forgotten.

Throughout all the centuries, in spite of the addition of thousands of borrowed words, and the dropping of many native words, the Anglo-Saxon element has remained the very heart of the language. The commonest words that we use are mostly Anglo-Saxon. *Man, woman, father, mother, brother, sister, child, food, meal, sleep, home, house*—these are some of our familiar Anglo-Saxon words.

*Is English
still mainly
Anglo-Saxon?*

When Latin words have tried to invade the heart of our language, they have usually remained a little formal and cool. For instance, *maternal* comes from the Latin *mater*. It is a good word, but it does not have the deep appeal to our feelings that the Anglo-Saxon word *motherly* has.

Words of Latin origin, however, form a very large part of our language. They came in by two roads. French, you remember, is a modern

*Do we use
many Latin
words?*

form of Latin. Latin words became changed through centuries of use in France, until they often were very different from the original Latin. For instance, the Latin word for "king" is *rex*. After the French had used the word for several hundred years, it became *roi*. It is easy to see, therefore, why our word *royal*, which came to us by way of French, is very different from our word *regal*, which comes to us directly from Latin, the root of the word *rex* being *reg*.

But the French form sometimes remained very much like the Latin. There is a Latin word, *persona*, which became in French *personne*, and which in English is *person*. A large number of Latin words came into English through French, while many other Latin words came by the direct road.

All during the Middle Ages, Latin was the language of the Church. There was only one Church (though there were many church buildings) in those days, and it was great and powerful. As there were few learned persons,

and these persons were connected with the Church, Latin was also the language of learning. It was the international language of the time, as well; educated persons in all European countries understood it.

While the common tongues of Europe were split into so many dialects that sometimes men living only a few miles apart could hardly understand each other, written Latin continued the same all over Europe, so that persons who had learned it from books were able to speak it and converse with one another, though they may have come from different countries and their pronunciation of the Latin words differed more or less.

The various new forms that Latin was taking, as common speech, kept changing, but the Latin of the days of Roman greatness, preserved in books, remained the same. As we have seen, this "book Latin" (as it was called) continued to be used by the Church. Even today, it is still used in the services of the Roman Catholic Church all over the world.

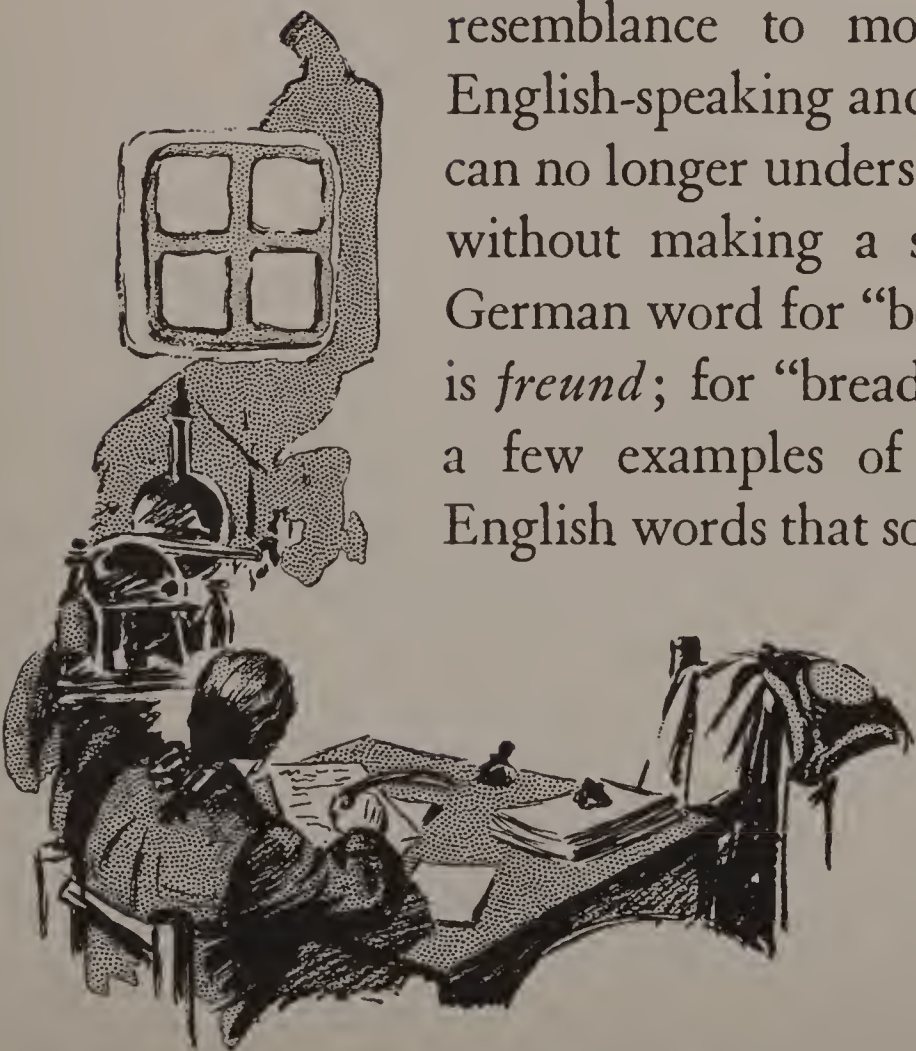
*Why was Latin
used so much in
the Middle Ages?*

*Is Latin still
used today?*

The practice of using Latin for very dignified and important purposes has lasted down into modern times. Queen Elizabeth spoke Latin fluently and effectively. Great scientists, like Sir Isaac Newton, who died in 1727, wrote their books in Latin. Wills and other legal papers were phrased in it. Even today, college diplomas are sometimes engraved in Latin.

Naturally this language of power and authority, used by the Church, by the law, and by learned men of all kinds, had a tremendous influence upon the English language, and Latin words were constantly making places for themselves in English.

In spite of all this, English bears a very strong resemblance to modern German, although English-speaking and German-speaking people can no longer understand each other's language without making a special study of it. The German word for "book" is *buch*; for "friend" is *freund*; for "bread" is *brot*. These are only a few examples of the many German and English words that sound somewhat alike. But



*Great scientists, like Sir
Isaac Newton, wrote
in Latin*

the English did not learn these words from the Germans, nor the Germans from the English. Such words are more or less alike, because German and English come from the same ancestral tongue, and many of their words are word-cousins.

*Why are German
and English
somewhat
alike?*

Just as French, Portuguese, Italian, and Roumanian are modern forms of Latin, so English, German, Dutch, Flemish, Danish, Norwegian, Swedish, and Icelandic are present-day varieties of the ancient Germanic or Teutonic language; but as the people who spoke that language did not possess the art of writing, we have no written records of their speech as we have of ancient Latin.

A language continues to be itself so long as its general structure and most of its common words survive, in spite of the changes that it undergoes with the passage of time, and however much it may enrich itself with new words borrowed from other languages.

Today we use countless words that have come into English from French, Latin, and Greek

(especially in the sciences), and a smaller number of words borrowed from Spanish, Italian, Portuguese, German, Dutch, Polish, Russian, Hungarian, Arabic, Hebrew, Persian, and even Chinese, Japanese, American Indian, Polynesian, and other strange tongues.

*Do adopted
words become
real English?*

In spite of all these borrowings, we are not speaking anything but English. When a word is adopted into our language, it becomes English, regardless of where it came from. Who would ever think of insisting that the word *tea* is not English but Chinese because it is from the Chinese *te*, or that *candy* is Arabic just because it is from the Arabic word *qand*, meaning “sugar.”

CHAPTER VII

OUR CHANGING SPEECH

IT IS as hard to say why languages change as to say why we change in looks as we grow older. We can, however, find out certain facts about what the changes are and how they come about, even if we cannot always say just *why*.

Language has several different kinds of change. We have already noticed how it changes its sounds, as in *knight*. This is known as phonetic, or sound change.

In Shakespeare's day the word *admire* meant "wonder at" or "marvel at." If an Englishman in 1600 said that he "admired" somebody's manners, he would not mean that he found this person's manners pleasing, but that his manners were so strange as to astonish him. The word is the same today, but its meaning has become different. This change of meaning is

*Do words change
their meanings?*

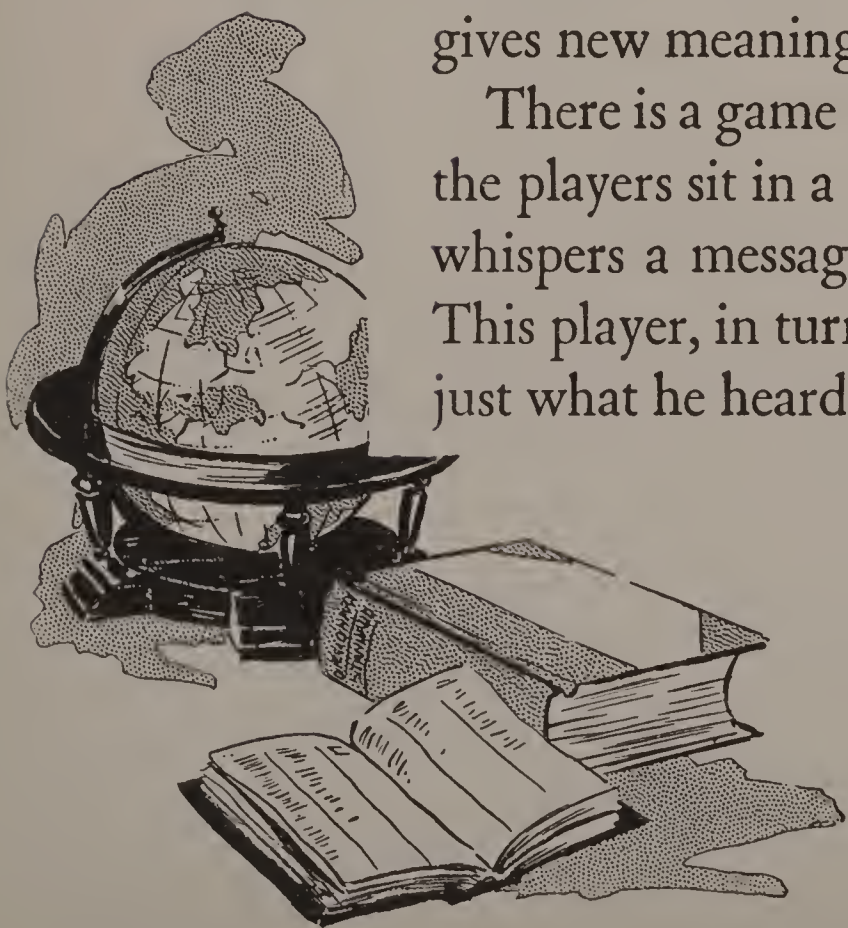
called a semantic change. Usually unknown to us at the time, it is always happening.

*What words
have changed
in form?*

If the plural of *foot* is *feet*, why is not the plural of *book*, *beek*? As a matter of fact, it once was that, with a difference only in the spelling of the written words. In Anglo-Saxon the words were *bōc* and *bēc*, corresponding to *fōt* and *fēt* (*foot* and *feet*). But it happens that most of the nouns in English form the plural by adding an *s*. Somehow this habit attached itself to *book* and made its plural *books* instead of *beek*. (Yet how funny it would sound if someone said “foots” for “feet!”) This is a change in the form or structure of a word.

There are a number of things that help a language to change. The need of expressing new ideas, for instance, brings in new words and gives new meanings to old words.

There is a game called “Telephone” in which the players sit in a row. The person at one end whispers a message to the player next to him. This player, in turn, must immediately whisper just what he heard, or what he thinks he heard,



*New ideas often bring new
words and change the old*

to the next person. When the message reaches the end of the line it usually is ridiculously different from the message as it started out.

Something of the same kind happens in the history of a language. As we noticed, there have been only eighteen generations since Chaucer wrote in the fourteenth century. We might compare these generations to eighteen players in the game. The language has passed from one player to the next, with tiny changes made in each transfer. The result is a language so greatly changed that the players at either end of the line in our imaginary game would hardly understand each other at all, if they could magically meet across the gulf of five centuries.

The changes in language are not usually made by anyone intentionally. In fact, people seldom are aware that such changes are being made. In the game, each player believes that he is passing on exactly what he heard. If he should intentionally change the message, the other players would consider it unfair and probably drop him out of the game.

*How does
language
change?*

*Can we "coin"
words?*

In the actual handing down of language the whole generation of course is the player, not just one person. If any one person tries to make changes in the language, his action usually has no effect whatever. He merely sounds queer to those about him, and the others go on in their way without paying any attention to him. Sometimes, however, a person may "coin" a new word, and if the word fills a need and becomes popular it will be adopted into the language. *Kodak* and *chortle* are recently coined words.

Those who have made a study of the sounds of our speech and the changes that have been made in them tell us that the language has become much easier to speak during the last five hundred years. Our tongues, our lips, and our vocal cords do not have to move with so much effort as before.

It is interesting to notice how the meanings of some words become weakened through careless use. Take the little word *very*, for instance. It is *very* sad to see that this once *very* useful

word is coming to mean *very* little. If you read that sentence over and over and leave out the word *very* every time, you will find that it means much the same without it as with it. Some people, trying to be forceful, might say “terribly,” “awfully,” or “frightfully,” instead of “very.”

*How do some
words lose
their meanings?*

But as you can readily guess, that is bad English, for we do not mean what we say. There is really no terror, nor awe, nor fright in the matter. Such use of these words simply means that *terribly*, *awfully*, *frightfully*, *horribly*, and many others are often used carelessly. When so used, they lose much of their original force.

Although these words are not good English when used in place of *very*, it is interesting to notice something that has happened in the German tongue. The German word for *very* is *sehr*. “Das ist sehr gut” means “that is very good.” But the word *sehr* once meant “painfully” or “sorely.” Our word *very* originally meant “truly,” coming to us, by way of the French, from the Latin *versus*, meaning “true.”

The natural tendency to be a little late or a little slow, or to put things off a while, has changed the meaning of other words. In Anglo-Saxon times, *soon* meant "immediately." We now use it to mean "after a little while." In the same way, when we say "in just a second," we generally mean several minutes.

By and by used to mean "side by side." Two boys standing side by side would have been said to be standing *by and by*. From meaning nearness in space, the phrase came to mean nearness in time—that is, the very next moment to this one. But slow people kept saying that they would do a thing "by and by" until now the phrase has scarcely any real meaning left.

What changes or adds to meanings of words?

Just as some words grow feeble, other words get additional meanings. *Keen* has several meanings now; it once had only one. It comes from the Anglo-Saxon word *cēne*, meaning "bold" or "able." It was used to describe a good soldier. A good soldier carried a good sword, and a good sword is one with a sharp edge. So the word came to be used for describing a good

sword, and then it got a new meaning, "sharp." Its old meaning, "bold," was later lost entirely. But the same word, in the form of *kühn*, still means "bold" in modern German.

Then, too, it frequently happens in the life of a word, that from having a broad meaning it comes to have a limited meaning. For instance, the word *grocer* comes from the French phrase *en gros*, which means "wholesale." A grocer, then, should be a wholesaler of all kinds of goods. Instead, he is now a retailer of food.

Just as often the change has worked in the other direction. From having one simple meaning, a word may come to have a much wider, vaguer sort of meaning. For instance, the word *pretty* comes from the Anglo-Saxon *praetig*, which meant "clever" or "crafty."

*Do some words
have queer
changes?*

Dear used always to mean "valued." It has not entirely lost that meaning, but it is much more commonly used as a term of fondness or affection. The word *precious* also is sometimes used in the same sense. And the word *fond* once meant "foolish."

Where did the
word "person"
come from?

Words frequently travel a long way from their original meanings. Take the Latin word *persona*, which we mentioned before. It is made up of two words: *per*, meaning "through;" and *sono*, a verb meaning "sound." A *persona* was a mask worn by actors on the stage, with an open mouth for speaking or making sounds through. From meaning a mask, *persona* came to mean the actor who wore it, and who represented someone in the play. It then came to mean anybody who represented anyone or anything else. In early English it was pronounced "parson." We still use *parson* for a man who represents the Church. But *person* today means any human being. Who would ever think now that *person* and *parson* once meant simply a false face and an open mouth?

Again, our increase of knowledge is all the time requiring new words to express new facts and to name new inventions. In the modern languages of Europe, the custom generally is to take certain Latin or Greek words, and form out of them the new words needed by science.



A "persona" was a mask worn by actors on the stage

The original words may be changed somewhat in order to make an English word that is easily pronounced.

For instance, the science of botany is full of words formed from the Latin. Trees belonging to the pine family are called *conifers*, which means "cone-bearing."

The word *photograph* has been molded from two Greek words meaning "light" and "write." When a photograph is made, the light is said to write on the plate or film to make the negative from which the picture is printed.

*What words
come from
the Greeks?*

In the same way, *telegraph* has been formed from Greek words meaning "far" and "write." So telegraphy is really "far writing." In the same way, *phonograph* comes from words meaning "sound" and "write." Another combination gives us *telephone*, the meaning of which you can now easily see.

Sometimes we combine Greek and Latin, as in *automobile*, the first two syllables of which are of Greek origin and the last two of Latin origin. The word means "self-moving."

What is the
history of
"electricity?"

Electricity has an interesting history. It comes from a Greek word, *ēlectron*, which means "amber." The first form of electricity discovered by man was the kind made by rubbing amber on woolen cloth. The Greeks were familiar with it. But the word *electricity* came into the English language only about three hundred years ago, soon after the birth of modern science. The ancient Greeks little dreamed that this mysterious force would some day be used to light the world at night, to pull trains of cars, and to carry messages and even music instantaneously through the air.

Occasionally, we make names for new inventions from old English words, as in *wireless* and *loud speaker*. In England the word *wireless* is also used where Americans prefer *radio*.

When two languages representing different civilizations or cultures rub elbows together, as in the southwestern part of the United States, which once belonged to Mexico, a considerable exchange of words is apt to take place. *Ranch*, *canyon*, *stampede*, *rodeo*, *broncho*, *coyote*, *som-*

brero, *pueblo*, and *adobe* have come from Spanish into English by this route.

Trade and commerce also bring in new words. *Potato*, *tobacco*, *banana*, *coffee*, and *tea* have come into English from other languages, along with the products that they name.

How are other words brought into English?

So, too, other languages borrow from English. *Sport*, *beefsteak*, and *wagon* are among the English words that have been taken over into French, although you might not recognize our old friend *beefsteak* in the French *bifteck*.

In recent years the World War did a great deal in giving words new meanings, the "coining" of new words, and the bringing of words from foreign countries into the English language. Words had to be found for new war machines and new ideas. American soldiers came back from France with French words which have now come into common usage. Some of these war-born words are: *ace*, an expert aviator; *camouflage*, to disguise; *Hooverize*, to save or economize; *slacker*, one

who avoids duty or responsibility, especially during time of war; *tank*, a new type of war machine, self-propelled, well armored and armed, which can travel over great obstacles, such as hills, trenches, and so on.

*Does language
as a whole
change?*

Thus we see how language is constantly changing. Words come, words change, and words go. It is like a great living tree. New branches grow; some of the old ones die and drop off. But it remains the same tree, in spite of all the changes.

So a language lives on through all the changes that it undergoes. Like the tree, it may divide into a number of limbs, with numerous smaller offshoots, through which the sap of the tree flows in fresh vigor. So even Latin is not really dead, nor is the Anglo-Saxon of our forefathers.

CHAPTER VIII

SOMETHING ABOUT "SLANG"

WE MAY think of a language as a city. The words are the inhabitants. Each person in a city has certain business and habits which he follows daily. So each word has its particular work and habits.

Just as in every large city there are always visitors passing through, so a language has some words and phrases that are not a permanent part of it.

Sometimes they are high-class foreign visitors who stay a while and then depart. For instance, the French phrase *fin de siècle*, meaning "end of the century," was very popular in this country during the 1890's. But it did not stay and take out citizenship papers; for when the new century began it fell into disuse. On the other hand, *chauffeur*, *garage*, *lingerie*, *dachshund*,

*What are
"visiting"
words?*

canyon, piano, and almost countless other foreign words have become good naturalized citizens of this great language-city.

*What are
colloquialisms?*

But not all of the visiting population of the city are high-class foreigners. In fact, most of them are native-born. These are called colloquialisms, which means words or phrases that are heard in common speech but are not used in literary language.

Some of these words finally get admitted into the society of our best words, but others remain more or less outcast. Many do not remain in the city very long. For instance, *shilly-shally*, a word expressing the idea of hesitation and springing from the question "shall I?," has been taken into good language company. But *nin-compoop*, which comes from the Latin phrase *non compos mentis*, meaning "not of sound mind," is still a colloquialism.

Then, too, just as every large city has a floating population of tramps, so has a language. The tramps are called "slang." This part of a language is always changing. A few such

words, however, find homes for themselves in the city, and, shedding their former bad associations, settle down and become useful and respected citizens.

We often find that a slang word that is now a tramp had at one time a definite, useful job, but has run away from it and now does any odd job that takes its fancy. Such a word may still be respected when it goes back to its rightful work, but it often loses its power to do its old work well.

*Are slang
words harmful
to language?*

Take the word *hectic*, for example. This word has taken up with a loose life. It is used to describe anything that is "hurried" or "feverishly exciting." Its real work was to mean "characterized by a wasting of the body; consumptive." Its true meaning, except in medical usage among doctors, is now practically lost.

Such words are frequently robbers as well. For instance, the word *cute*, which is a shortened form of *acute*, rightfully means, "clever," "shrewd," or "sharp." In colloquial use in the United States it has come to mean "bright" or

“attractive.” It has thrown out a number of more honest adjectives in some people’s speech. Perhaps you may hear someone even say, “What a *cute* sunset!” Of course, the word has no right at all to be in such a place as that.

*What happens
if slang is
used too much?*

If such tramp words as *cute*, *swell*, *nifty*, *slick*, *keen*, *grand*, and the like were allowed to do as they liked, there would soon be very few good adjectives left, and our language would become poverty-stricken in this respect. But fortunately there is no danger of this. The slang of one year or generation is often gone in the next, and a new crop takes its place. The language is not, as a whole, much affected by it. The slang of our grandfathers’ day now makes us smile, because it sounds so quaint and old-fashioned.

As we have already noticed, some slang words finally settle down, mind their own business, and do a certain kind of work so well that they end by becoming respected citizens. A number of good English words have come up from the slums of slang in this way.

Grit, as a term denoting "personal courage," has become a very good word. *Bunk*, meaning "deceit" or "sham," is not yet quite out of the slang class; but *buncombe*, from which it comes, has been a good word for many years. *Chum*, a word for "an intimate companion," has moved up out of slang; *pal*, while still slang, may before long follow it; but *buddy* is more doubtful.

*Does slang
ever become
good English?*

Much of our slang comes from the practice of using technical terms to express general meanings. For instance, *start in*, meaning "begin," is lumber-camp talk and comes from *starting into* the woods to begin logging work. To *tie on the feed-bag* is a perfectly correct way to describe the feeding of a horse. Applied to human beings, it is just as coarse and rude as wearing clothes smelling of the stable into a friend's dining-room would be. Such phrases become slang by being used in the wrong place. The intention may be to give an effect of humor, but it is not always funny.

Slang becomes popular because of some very

deep-rooted speech habits. Sometimes, as we have just seen, there is the attempt to be humorous. Again, there may be the selfish pleasure of using terms that are puzzling at first to most people. These, however, are not the most common reasons for the use of slang. People adopt slang words from love of novelty or by catching a passing fashion.

In studying the earliest writings of a people, we generally find that their literature takes the form of poetry. The appeal of poetry is very deep indeed. Poetry, in fact, was used before writing became known, because speech that moves in rhythm is easier to memorize.

*What is
figurative
language?*

In poetry much use is made of figurative language, in which one thing is spoken of as something else. For instance, in *Beowulf*, a famous Anglo-Saxon poem, the sea is called "the whale-road," "the swan-road," and "the water-street." A boat is "a wave-rider," "a floater," or "the sea-wood."

Turn to the sport page of an American newspaper, and you will find the same kind of poetic

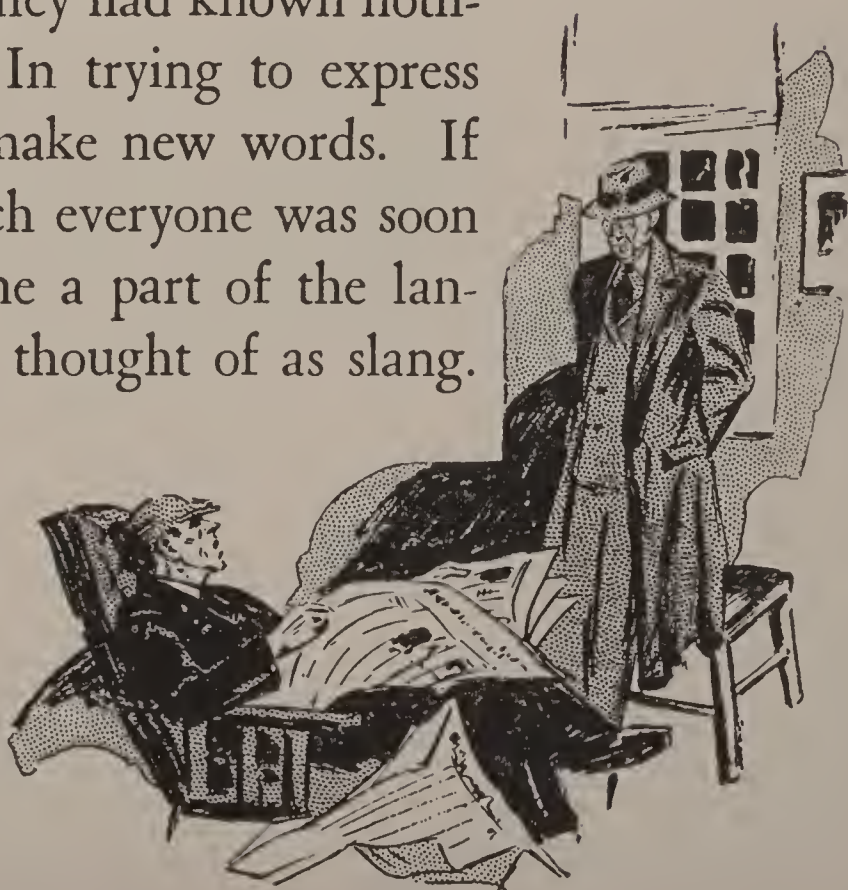
words in abundance. A football becomes "the pigskin" or "the oval." A football field is "the gridiron." Teams are referred to by the name of their coach, of the colors of the school, of the school mascot, or even of an industry. So we have "the Yostmen," "the Purple," "the Badgers," and "the Boilermakers."

How does a newspaper use poetic words?

The effect of all this is slang. Strictly speaking, however, it is a poetic way of describing things, and is known as *metonymy*, which means the calling of a thing by the name of something that it resembles or suggests or that is connected with it, rather than by its own name.

Many words used in the United States may be traced to the time when they were first used in early America. The first settlers saw and heard new things which they had known nothing about in England. In trying to express themselves they had to make new words. If it was a good word, which everyone was soon using, it gradually became a part of the language, and then was not thought of as slang.

American newspapers contain many figurative words



They were words which were needed to express something new. For instance, the Pilgrim Fathers drew lots in order to divide the land, and each share became known as a *lot*. Today we still use *lot* meaning a piece of land. Thus words have been added to the English tongue in America that are not used, at least in the same way, in other countries where English is spoken, although eventually they may be taken into the language there. It is for this reason that Sir William A. Craigie, a noted English scholar now a professor at the University of Chicago, where he is working on a new American dictionary, says that Americans speak American and not English.

*What gives slang
its bad
reputation?*

Slang has a bad reputation because it so often abuses its rights. But slang and colloquial words are natural in a live language. They are often very useful in their place, to give vigor to spoken remarks. Nearly always, however, they have no place in writing, nor even in speech when we should be serious in our tone.

CHAPTER IX

THE SPEECH OF TOMORROW

LANGUAGE may change slowly or rapidly. In countries where there is little change, and life runs smoothly, language continues much the same for long periods. In Iceland, for instance, a remote island whose people have been to a large extent cut off from the rest of the world, the language has changed but little in nearly a thousand years. But in times of war and confusion, or of changing social conditions, language is likely to change very fast.

When is language likely to change rapidly?

We have seen how in the history of English, with repeated invasions of the island and shifts in the population, together with frequent wars, great changes in the life of the people, and much increase of knowledge, the language has changed rather rapidly. Can we foretell what is going to happen to our language?

In early times, language varied almost from village to village, and hundreds of dialects sometimes flourished within the bounds of a single small country. In those days, too, roads were bad, and people traveled little. There was no need for people to have exactly the same speech as people of other districts than their own, or to understand the language of other countries.

*Do we need
similar languages
today?*

But in our day good highways, swift automobiles and busses, fast trains and steamships, and even airplanes, are making it possible for people to travel great distances in a short time. Thus we hear not only the speech of our own community but that of many other communities. The radio, too, brings widely scattered communities together. Thus the little differences that go to break a language into various dialects are continually being sandpapered down by rubbing together.

There have been other influences at work to wipe out local peculiarities of speech. In the Middle Ages practically no one could read but the priests and the monks, and they read

mostly Latin. Now, almost everyone not only can but does read every day. This is the age of print. Our daily papers have tremendous circulations. Thousands of magazines flourish, and more books are being published than ever before in the history of the world. And our everyday speech naturally is affected by what we read in these publications.

*Does reading
tend to do this?*

As distances are made less noticeable by our swift modern means of travel, the need for a language understood over great spaces increases. The tendency of the future will doubtless be toward fewer languages, understood by more people. It is barely possible that, at some time in the distant future, one language may become more and more widely spoken until all mankind joins in using the same speech.

Various attempts have been made to build artificial world-languages, but they have not met with the success that some of their enthusiastic friends expected of them. One, however, called Esperanto, has many followers, and a number of books have been printed in it. It is a sort of

*What is
Esperanto?*

much-simplified combination of different European languages.

The more widely the habit of reading spreads, and the more that people listen to the same language used over the radio and in the "talkies," the less variation there will be in the speech of those speaking the same language. With these strong influences working to make language uniform, it will be but natural for language to become more stable in time as well as in space. In other words, changes in a language will come more slowly.

*Should a
language have
stability?*

The stability of a language has certain advantages. The more rapidly a language changes, the more are the people cut off from the culture and traditions of their past. Surely it would be a loss if our language began to change so greatly that only special scholars could understand Shakespeare, Milton, Shelley, Keats, and other poets who are the glory of English literature.

As we have seen, Chaucer, the first great English poet, wrote only about five hundred

years ago; yet the language has changed so greatly since his time that now only experts can read *The Canterbury Tales* with ease and natural enjoyment. And it is only a little more than three centuries since Shakespeare died; but his plays already contain many words that have gone out of use or that have changed in meaning since then.

But the greater changes in a language take place so slowly that we cannot see the motion even when we know that it is going on. It is, therefore, almost impossible to tell in just what direction a language is moving. Only by looking far back into its history can we determine some of the chief trends of its change, as a man crossing a wide stretch of snow or sand can, only by looking back, see whether he has been walking in a straight line or in a circle.

The scholars who have studied the history of the Indo-European languages, as far back as it is possible to go, have discovered a few such trends. On the whole, these trends seem to be making the languages easier to learn and

*Does language
tend to become
simpler?*

to speak, without lessening their power as a means of expression.

*How has the
verb "had"
changed?*

If we go as far back as the fourth century since Christ, and look at Gothic, an East Germanic tongue that has left written records, we find that its verbs were most complex. Our little three-letter word *had*, the past tense of the verb *have*, did not exist in Gothic. But for fifteen different ways that we use *had*, the Goths used fifteen different words. The shortest of these was seven letters long, and the longest had twelve letters.

Anglo-Saxon bettered this condition by reducing the fifteen words to six, and their lengths to only six or eight letters. The English of Chaucer's time made things still simpler by making the six words still shorter and easier to say. Modern English has reduced all six to the simple little word *had*. Where the Goths said *habaidēdum*, the Anglo-Saxons said *haefdon*, the English of the Middle Ages said *hadde* or *hadden*, we make it simply *had*.

The changes in the form of nouns, called



*Many changes have been going on in the
Romance languages*

inflection, also have been much simplified. Except for the difference between the singular and the plural, the only change that we now make in the form of our nouns is to show possession; as, "the boy's hat." Even this change is limited mostly to persons and animals. We say "the wall of the house," rather than "the house's wall."

The tendency, then, is toward shorter, unchanging words. We no longer tell the relationship of a word to the other words in a sentence by its ending. This relationship is now shown by the order of the words in the sentence, and the grammatical character of the words themselves.

Similar changes have been going on in the Romance languages. Latin, in evolving into French, Spanish, Italian, and other modern forms, has become greatly simplified. In Latin, the noun changes were very numerous. The word for "boy," for instance, was *puer*; "of the boy" was *pueri*, "to the boy" was *puero*, and so on. Such changes have now disappeared al-

*Do other
languages
change, too?*

together, with the exception of a difference between the singular and the plural, in French, Spanish, and Italian. These languages do not even have a possessive form, as in English. In French, "Uncle Tom's Cabin" becomes "La Case de l'Oncle Tom" (The Cabin of the Uncle Tom).

The same thing has been going on in Greek. Ancient Greek had several verb and noun forms that have disappeared from the spoken language of today. Other kinds of words, too, have become simpler.

In English a few nouns, such as *sheep* and *deer*, have the same form both in the singular and in the plural. All other words have a special form for the plural. Occasionally, the plural is formed in a special way, as in *man* and *men*, *mouse* and *mice*, *goose* and *geese*, *child* and *children*, *ox* and *oxen*, but usually it is formed by adding *s* or *es*.

The little words called pronouns still have special forms for use in different senses, such as *I*, *me*, *my*; *he*, *him*, *his*, and so on. But there

What other words have become simpler?

are few pronouns and it is easy to remember the different forms. And even the pronouns are getting simpler. A few hundred years ago, *thou*, *thee*, and *thine* were used in speaking to one person. The pronouns *ye*, *you*, and *your* were used in speaking to more than one person. Now we have dropped *thou*, *thee*, and *thine*, except in poetry and prayer, and we have also dropped *ye*. Today the only pronouns that we use in speaking to one person or to several are *you* and *yours*.

*How have our
pronouns
changed?*

Our adjectives have only one form, as in “a *good* man,” “*good* men,” “a *good* woman,” “*good* women,” though in French and other languages the adjectives still have separate forms for masculine and feminine, singular and plural.

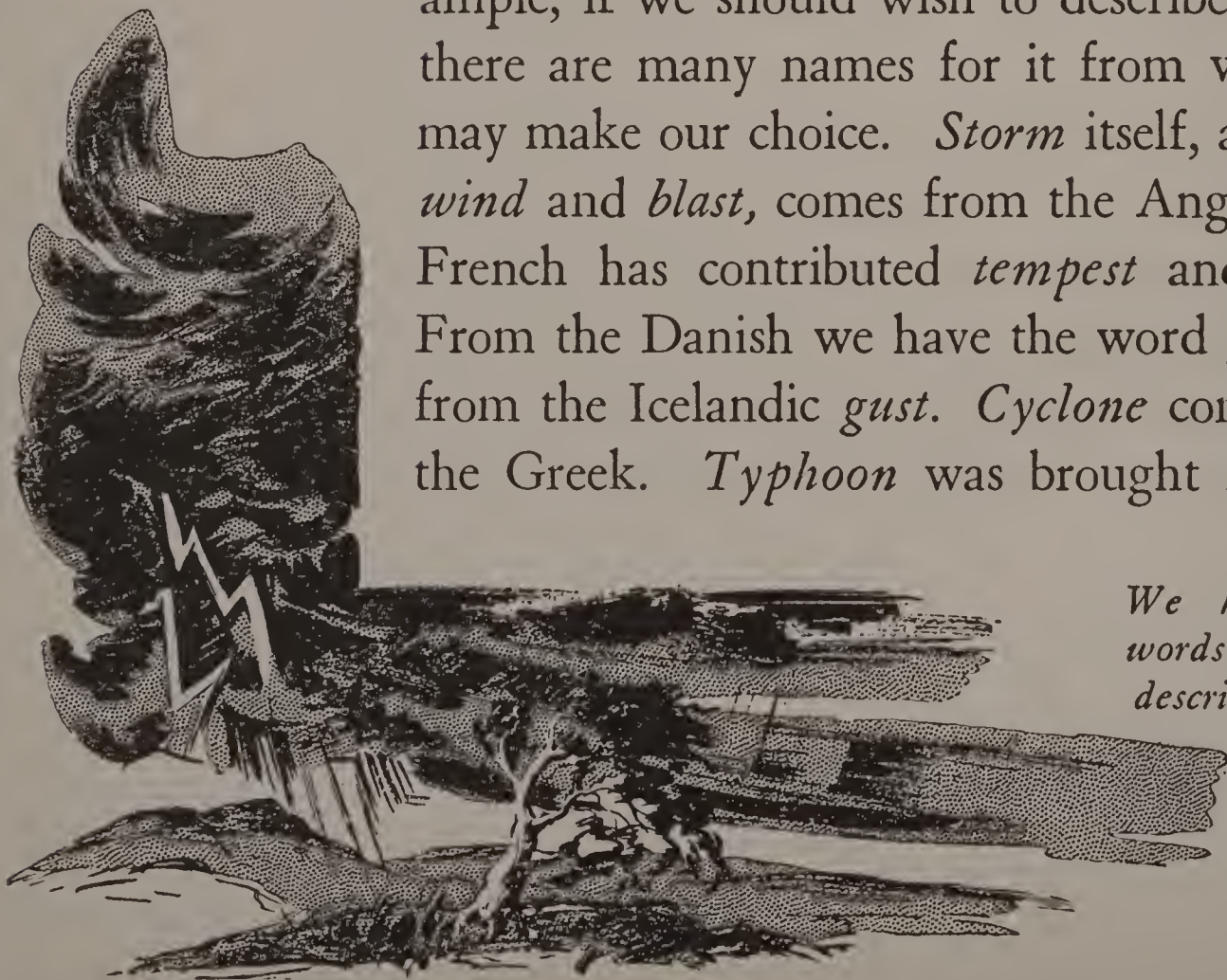
A foreigner learning English is usually bothered by the lack of regularity in our spelling. These irregularities are also very troublesome to school children whose native language is English, and sometimes they are annoying even to the children’s elders. Our spelling simply

has not kept pace with the changes in pronunciation. As we have seen, the language has changed a great deal, but many words are still written in the old-fashioned spelling, because people formed the habit of spelling them in that way. But even spelling has changed to some extent, as you will see at once if you read a few pages of a book printed three hundred years ago. An effort is now being made to simplify the spelling of a number of words; many people now write "tho" for "though," "thru" for "through," and "thot" for "thought." Most people, however, still cling to the older spelling.

*How has English
become rich
in words?*

The English language has gathered a rich harvest of words from many sources. For example, if we should wish to describe a storm, there are many names for it from which we may make our choice. *Storm* itself, as well as *wind* and *blast*, comes from the Anglo-Saxon. French has contributed *tempest* and *breeze*. From the Danish we have the word *gale*, and from the Icelandic *gust*. *Cyclone* comes from the Greek. *Typhoon* was brought from the

*We have many
words that will
describe a storm*



South Seas by the Portuguese. The Spanish gave us *tornado*, as well as *hurricane*, the latter coming originally from the Caribbean. *Whirlwind* is a combination of *whirl*, which came into early English from the Scandinavian, and the Anglo-Saxon *wind*. *Blizzard* is a word of recent origin in the American Middle West.

English has one very great advantage which we who are most familiar with it often do not fully appreciate. In many languages of the Indo-European family there is an elaborate system of gender. Latin has three genders: masculine, feminine, and neuter. In French, there are only two genders: masculine and feminine. But one must remember the gender of every single noun in order to use the right form of article (like our *the*, *a*, and *an*) and the right form of adjective with it.

In French, the words for “the door,” “the window,” “the chair,” and “the table” (*la porte*, *la fenêtre*, *la chaise*, and *la table*), for instance, are feminine, while the words for “the bed,” “the rug,” “the floor,” and “the wall” (*le lit*,

*What is one
great advantage
English has?*

le tapis, le plancher, and le mur) are masculine. In French there is no word for *it*; everything is spoken of as *he* or *she*. In English we have no artificial genders to remember, although sometimes we like to speak of a ship as *she*, or the sun as *he*. But this use is limited mostly to poetry and is confined to a very few words.

How else is
English
simplified?

In English, too, the definite article *the* is the same before all words, both masculine and feminine, singular and plural. And the indefinite article, *a*, changes to *an* only before words beginning with a vowel sound, to make the pronunciation easier.

German and some other modern European languages have three genders, like Latin. This seems very awkward to us, especially since sex and gender do not always agree. For example, in German, *das Mädchen* (the girl) is not feminine; it is neuter.

English is a vigorous language and a progressive one. It is a democratic language which has not scorned to enrich itself with words and phrases from all parts of the world. The great

wealth that it has thus gathered it has molded to its own style and uses.

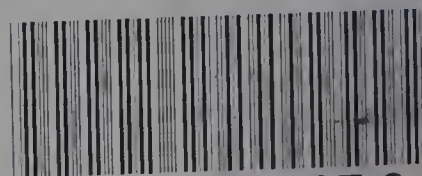
In the course of a few centuries, English has spread far beyond its original home. It has become one of the group of the world's outstanding languages, others of which are French, Spanish, Russian, Chinese, Arabic, and Malay-Polynesian.

Today English faces the future, a language with a long and checkered history, yet full of life and youthful spirit. It is spoken by ever-increasing millions, and its progressiveness, richness of expression, and simplicity of structure will doubtless bring it, in the years that lie ahead, to an even more important position in the speech of the world.

*Is English a
powerful
tongue?*

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